

Understanding the Juneau County Diversion Program

WHO

The diversion program is designed for misdemeanor offenders who need assistance getting their lives back on track. It exists for those offenders who commit offenses like damaging mailboxes or stealing low-value items. It is not designed for felony or violent offenders.

WHAT

The Juneau County District Attorney's Office operates this program through a federal grant. It's designed to provide "wrap-around" services to participants, who must sign a written agreement and successfully complete all of the provisions. This can include payment of restitution, community service, drug and alcohol counseling, anger management classes and job skills training. Participants also must attend an educational seminar where ethics, leadership, driver's licensing, budgeting, and job interviewing skills are taught. Upon successful performance of societal expectations, criminal charges plead to, are dismissed. Individuals who do not comply with their agreements are revoked and sentenced for their crimes.

HOW

The program utilizes a series of tools to help offenders and hold them accountable at the same time. Whether alcohol and other drug counseling, obtaining an HSED, getting a driver's license, finding a job or learning how to make ethical choices, the program provides the participant with a lot of "tough love" in order to ensure both accountability and a chance to succeed.

What makes Juneau County's program unique amongst diversion programs is ongoing "community links" -- job shadow opportunities, community service, and mentoring. Most young offenders (age 17 to 25), have not integrated into our community. Our key to success requires that adult mentors be found who are willing to complete a 3 hour training and allocate 3 hours per month communicating in person or by phone with their mentee. It is hoped that mentorship will help offenders discover better routes to self-sufficiency, which ultimately will move our community a safer place to live and work and play.

Key goals:

- A. Help a participant make better life choices through ongoing contacts a mentor.
- B. Help participants overcome key hurdles, such as reinstatement of driver license, choosing suitable employment and recognizing transferable skills.
- C. Reducing recidivism and save money by incarcerating fewer young people.

WHY

Data collected and reported to professionals who conduct cost-benefit analysis will facilitate a determination as to whether ongoing contact with a mentor effectively reduces recidivism. Southworth and Albers know from experience, that to effect change there must be a plan of action, along with vision, and that mere talk, hope and written commitments are no guarantee of success. We know good character is not created by chance, but more like a seed, must be planted and nurtured and tends to be conveyable only by those who possess it. To quash the host of negative influences in the life of a troubled young adult, to avoid the spiraling downward effect that comes from making one bad decision after another, after another, and channel through chaos, certain hurdles must be removed or overcome. The "one-size-fits-all-approach" offered in a number of other counties, hasn't achieved the desired result, so here, unique circumstances of each offender are taken into consideration, and to change lives, one person at a time, a number of positive influences are injected into the life of an offender.

For more information, or to obtain a mentor application, contact: Special Prosecutor Sheryl Albers 608-847-9601 Sheryl.Albers@da.wi.gov